



Organic Food Program (OFP) Survey Results 2004

The following comments were written verbatim from the 79 customer surveys returned on or before April 18, 2004. All comments in quotations are direct quotes from the applicants. All comments not in quotations are in the words of the OAB member who conducted the interview.

1. He is concerned that OFP has gone overboard with international certification. US farms are bound by law, and must sign documents to treat their labor fairly. Some countries, for example Chile, do not have these standards and laws yet we are in competition with Chilean fruit. This isn't fair that they pay way less for the same labor but are in direct competition with us. It is not an even playing field and the OFP is sticking its nose where it doesn't belong with international certification.
2. She is satisfied overall. The process has gotten simpler through time.
3. This grower feels he and other small growers are compromised by large scale organic farms, corporate ag. Business interests moving into organic ag will hurt us all in the long run. (See Mike Brown – a huge operation who has been in trouble for decades but keeps opening up well-drilling mines, practices as organic farms. This person has no sympathy for him as he has known that died under his practice).
4. It would be nice if there was online access to a wider variety of information relating to organic certification, especially the rules of organic certification. Online information saves everyone's time. Organic certification is very important – is the cornerstone of our organic coffee business, and therefore more information and a wider variety of information should be available online.
5. David requests that he does not get a Morrison with Grant County. He would like someone else to inspect his farm.
6. OFPProgram has worked well with his concord grape operation. Certification and related information was very easy for them to go through.
7. Would love to see some help on showing grower how to direct market their organic crop. Also would like to see the Inspector more (but doesn't want to pay more).
8. He is no longer going to farm organic, the owner sold the farm.
9. Thinks WSDA inspectors are doing a very good job, and work very hard and are very helpful.
10. New to program, "Let me wait and see."
11. Katherine Lange is a really good inspector. Ones before were poor.
12. Keep it simple.
13. It would be nice to speed up processes, hard for grower to get it to them when it takes so long to get back. Paperwork is really slow.
14. Inspection package is huge and cumbersome. Inspection package is a pain. Okay with electronic inspection, however, wants a hard copy following inspections. Certificate often arrives after produce is being sold – this is a flaw. Certification costs are continuing to increase as certified land area increasing. My inspection fees

increase, why should I be charged when chemical farmers don't have to pay any fees. Considering withdrawing from certification if there is a need to provide a certificate to wholesalers. More interest in building a direct market supply. Inspectors are nothing but helpful. Help to interpret and comply with the rules. Very important to retain honesty. As farmers grow into larger operations, concern that the grower loses hands on control.

15. Would like to hear that the application has been received. Should be more contact as to the status of an application. Additional communication needed. Has received paperwork but no formal training. Would be good to see a formal training program provided for new operations. Training program or booklet/introductory package. No happy with removal of anniversary date on certificates. Falls to an operator to check vendor to ensure certificate is still in force. No way of knowing if a certificate is withdrawn or revoked. Need a cleaner system. OFP newsletter good idea – would like to see electronic distribution.
16. Doing a good job.
17. The farm plan must be filled in 4-5 months prior to farming operation so it is difficult to list inputs. Feels obligated to answer but with the knowledge that the answer may not be correct.
18. If some people wanted to cheat, they could. You will always get dishonest people. Good and bad aspects adjusting to the NOP. Manure and compost requirements are difficult – has forced us to review our practices and procedures. Finding allowable compost difficult. Has to apply compost at a less than favorable time of year (ie in wet weather).
19. Wish the fees were not as high. Has not had any customers give negative feedback to WSDA-OFP logo/certification. Small farmers need help to deal with the marketing sales jungle (D3). OFP does a good job (D5). Need more testing if based on a complaint but the last thing I want are increased fees as a result (B3).
20. B.3. “Good Question. It’s a possibility. Don’t know how easy.” D.3. (first) “Not sure how well it does.” D.3 (second) “I hope so.”
21. B.2. Was not present for the inspection, his supervisor stood in for him.
B.3. Yes, it is easy to cheat – especially because they are in Alaska. They don’t do it because they value what organic certification means, but they know there are other coffee roasters in Alaska that are over the \$5000 threshold that are selling “organic” products that are not certified – they know they are the only certified organic coffee roaster in Alaska. They also know that some of the larger outfits (ie. Seattle’s Best Coffee, Safeway Select) have put “organic” coffee products in the stores in Alaska without naming a certifier. They believe in the process of organic certification, but also think the rules should be enforced for everyone using the word “organic”.
D.3 (second 3). They believe that the value will be there long term.
22. B.3. “Don’t know, never tried it.”
B.9. “Don’t enjoy computers.”
D.3. (second 3) “Don’t know how to answer because my volume is marginal and I don’t make much profit.”
General: “Much of what I have provided in these answers is superfluous because I only gross between \$300-500 per year.”
23. A.4. Some things are confusing
B.2. Not difficult to pass if you have things correct.
D.3.(first 3) Thinks it somewhat addresses needs.
24. B.3. It would be easy to cheat, but it is also easy to get caught.
D.4. Inadequate training was his primary criticism. General: He thinks the FAQ on your website should be changed to read “Frequently Granted Loopholes”. On Page 1 it reads “You can’t do this. . .”, then on Page 55 he notes that there are “Frequently Granted Loopholes. He thinks Page 1 should be the RULE in bold print. He interprets the page 55 to mean that a non-certified producer who uses a certified handler as a middle-man can

sell products as though they are certified – while in fact they are not. He also has an issue with acceptability of certified products for animals. He says there is an herbal dewormer (sold by www.7mfarm.com in Utah) that should be on the approved products list. It is a great product that gets great results. Since it is not listed, it deters other animal farmers from being certified – because worms are their #1 concern. Final comments: “Don’t give up, don’t stop, keep going.”

25. B.2 – Inspections are cut and dried.

B.3 – Supposes it would be easy if you had the right connections, knows it has been done, doesn’t know how extensive cheating is. B.4, 5, 6, 7 – Has high regard for his inspector. Says he does a very good job.

A.5, B.9, D.2 – Electronic Communication. Has a computer, but it does not work – so electronic communication is not relevant to him at this time.

D.3 (2nd #3) – Last year the value of certification was worth the costs, the year before it was not. However, this was not related to the WSDA’s service, just problems related to marketing. General Comments – WSDA OFP is doing a “pretty fair job”.

26. A.4. At first, when we were learning about organic cert. some things were not clear. Now that we have been in the program for three years everything is clear. The NOP rule has also helped.

B.1. Kevin has only 2nd hand knowledge of the actual certification inspection. His organic cert. person was present.

B.2. Not difficult to pass inspection because they are prepared – thanks to communication with WSDA OFP office before the inspection.

B.3. Without good ethical practices, it may be easy to cheat. In general it would be hard, but for specific items it would be easier. For instance, it might be easy to cheat the standards in coffee roasting --- because the genetics might be hard to trace. However, he thinks the paper trail probably makes it hard. He said that there really is no incentive to cheat, because the integrity of the company is made on the products they offer and they are “sold” on their approach to organics. Their customers can’t get enough. There is a huge brand risk to doing it wrong – or to cheating.

B. 6-8. The WSDA OFP office facilitated the information needs even before the inspector arrived. However, the inspector was very helpful, too.

B. 8. Before the inspector left they know how they did. B.9. They are working to make their business as paper free as possible.

C.1. They have some challenges with the international issues, both in supply and marketing. He needed more information to adequately answer these questions. He suggested that his organic person be contacted to discuss this further. Dave Wickberg. Kevin (kbrady@starbucks.com) said he would facilitate further conversations. He also mentioned the difficulty of sourcing organic coffee from small, economically challenged coffee producers in Latin America. He said that while organic certification might not be an economic barrier for Starbucks, it IS an economic barrier for the producers they work with. Effort needs to be made in this arena to facilitate certification.

C.2. The biggest challenge in EU and Japan is the different certifications necessary to get into those markets. He said they do not feel up to speed on the ins and outs of that issue. If they could have one certification that could cover them for every country, that would be best – they are interested in further conversations with WSDA – OFP on how to improve this.

D.4. We are “gapping” on adequate training for rules and procedures. He mentioned that they feel as though they learn more by making mistakes and/or through reactive processes. He would like to see the training become more proactive, where they learn before they have a problem. He would like to be able to attend trainings where he and his staff could develop skills. He asked if there was a website to facilitate training?

General: Would like to work on improving communication with WSDA OFP. They view OFP as a resource more than a regulator. Organic certification fits nicely with the mission and environmental statement of Starbucks. They want to become subject-matter experts in organic certification, so they can improve communication with their suppliers and customers. They take pride in their certification and in what they are doing as a company – and they do it because it is the right thing to do for their customers and farmers – not because it makes a bigger margin for Starbucks. They still cannot meet their customers’ demand for organic products, and they want to become a more significant and influential player in the global organic community, facilitating organic certification for small, economically challenged producers. The scale of Starbucks as an organization creates a special

challenge. They would be open to, and invite, further discussion with WSDA OFP on how to facilitate improved communication. Kevin reaffirmed the idea that organic certification is important to the culture of Starbuck as a company by mentioning that he is in the process of certifying his own farm for his family.

27. A.5. His staff member that fills out reports would like electronic.
A.6. Most of the time, correspondence has been returned in a timely manner. Though when the fees were changed to calendar year, he paid them twice on some of his product – his calls to get this straightened out were not handled in a timely manner. Voiced some frustration on this issue.
B.2. Some things in early certifications had to be corrected before he received certification – but recent inspections have gone easily.
B.3. Residual testing of fields is a deterrent to cheating, He wouldn't want to take the chance.
B.4. The first inspector was not as good as the one who has inspected the last few times.
B.8. Inspection reports sometimes happen near harvest time – not good for him.
B.9. **Not sure he understood the question.** He said he didn't understand how it would work --- and urged caution not to computerize the inspection. He likes to have the a "live person" to talk with during the inspection to clear up questions.
C.2. Doesn't think EU certification is worth the effort on behalf of him – because of the organic only ultimatum. It's not economical for him to take that step at this time. If he had to choose, he'd have to drop the organic for economical reasons.
28. Very helpful and knowledgeable staff.
29. Likes idea of going electronic due to lots of paper. Close to becoming a producer but has concerns about health requirements. Standards geared toward larger firms (mostly health department).
30. Hard to get a hold of someone at office, takes 2-4 calls. People are good and knowledgeable and friendly.
31. Seen growth and improvement in the last 3 or 4 years. Standards and procedures more organized now. Questions how many bakeries in state are certified.
32. Too many loop holes in seed business – growers choose varieties not offered organic to avoid expense. No enough checking on availability.
33. I would like to see a reduction in the amount of paperwork required.
34. He had not received updated notification of this year's certification cost from Sandra and thought this should have been done by now.
35. Would like to see better notification if materials are dropped from the Brand Names List.
36. Consistency among inspectors is lacking. Has not been able to bundle paperwork from two processor locations to avoid redundant paperwork.
37. Everything has gone reasonably well and I'm overall satisfied.
38. Fee schedule is problematic.
39. EU standard is too tough.
40. Has concerns about larger corporate operations cutting costs by cutting corners.
41. Been satisfied but more training materials/workshops are always good.

42. First year in program, appreciates the challenges that OFP has in front of them. "Thank you."
43. "John Morrison is a great inspector."
44. Too small, getting out of organic.
45. OFP is too rule conscious, versus overseeing.
46. No problems.
47. Doesn't like the NOP process for finding problems and correcting it – too harsh.
48. In the program as a financial improvement over conventional only.
49. Three comments were offered:
 - A. Overall, her company is very satisfied with WSDA's very professional services.
 - B. Her only criticism is that because WSDA is a busy office, the turn-around time for new product registration is slower than they would like it to be.
 - C. WSDA's services are a good value for the benefit they received.
50. Bruce had a few comments regarding the cheating issue. He feels that the inspectors could be sharper about how to detect cheating practices. Also, they could be snoopier than they are.
51. He does not have any contact with the Olympia office, only with his local inspector.
52. Other comments:
 - A. He's against electronic stuff because it may take away from the field inspectors, who he feels do a wonderful job.
 - B. They handle problems professionally, and when necessary dig around until they find answers.
53. Bob offered one goal/suggestion: He would like to see all organic certification programs at the state, federal, and international levels coordinate with one another for a single certification standard.
54. During the interview, it was discussed that question 1 of Section C and question 1 of Section D would both have been answered as "usually" had the word "farming" not been in the questions. The applicant is not a farmer so this made the question not applicable.
55. No comments at this time.
56. She would like to see more resources available for organic processing aids.
57. Very helpful if automatically 1st of May or so put together a packet of how many acres of each variety of product is planted or is in growth – then farmers can plan for the future – whatever is certified. Has a sore button when it comes to trade – wants it to happen – it needs to be bilateral and fair.
58. Ought to keep organic rules stricter so we don't water the program down.